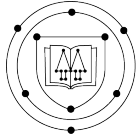


**Platform
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INSTITUTE
FOR THE
COOPERATIVE
DIGITAL
ECONOMY

NOTES TOWARD A LIVING: HOW GROUPMUSE BUILDS A PLATFORM COOPERATIVE FOR MUSICIANS

A Report by
Mosa Tsay

About the Institute for Digital Cooperative Economy (ICDE)

The Institute conducts cross-disciplinary research about the emerging cooperative digital economy, which is relatively uncharted territory in anthropology, political science, sociology, history, law, and economics. This rapidly expanding field is also inextricably linked to labor and cooperative studies. This work is concerned with finance, entrepreneurship, and organizational studies in business schools. Governance and corporate structure are critical subjects in law schools. The Institute's mission, in recognition of existing research gaps, is to provide applied and theoretical knowledge, education, and policy analysis.

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In the United States, musicians often navigate precarious careers shaped by unequal access to funding, venues, and professional networks. These conditions make sustainable artistic work untenable—and position models grounded in solidarity, rather than competition, as not only appealing but foundational. For musicians, the ability to turn joy and sorrow into music depends not just on talent, but on resources, environment, and the chance to act when opportunity aligns.

Report Scope and Approach

In this ICDE report, which includes contributions from Sam Bodkin and Kyle Nichols-Schmolze, Groupmuse’s founders, I build on that legacy of constrained creativity by exploring how one platform cooperative is turning house concerts into a viable market and income stream for U.S. musicians—revealing how structure, values, and ownership shape who gets heard and who gets paid. Rooted in the solidarity economy traditions of Indigenous and Black cooperatives, such as jazz collectives, this model fosters collaboration and bridges the divide between administrators and artists in music organizations.

I begin by examining income and employment conditions for U.S. musicians to show how house concerts can help fill economic gaps. Then, I analyze the challenges freelancers face in a transactive and extractive market, and how Groupmuse’s model of nonmonetary exchange offers a more reciprocal alternative. In a competitive landscape with few opportunities, house concerts allow musicians to grow their audience and community on more equitable and generative terms.



A string quartet performed in 2017 at an art gallery in Rockaway Beach, as part of a Groupmuse-organized event. Photo by Erin Pearlman.

Case Study: Groupmuse at a Glance

Groupmuse, a U.S.-based platform cooperative, has hosted house concerts since 2013, connecting performers, hosts, and audiences through its website. With around 10,000 events, 3,000 performers, and 65,000 attendees, it brings live music into living rooms, backyards, and private spaces. By centralizing and opening up the traditionally private house concert scene, Groupmuse creates an accessible source of supplemental income. More than a booking tool, it invites artists into a cooperative ecosystem grounded in self-help, democracy, equality, and solidarity.

Freelance cellist James Jaffe recalled that when he moved to San Francisco in 2014, he felt an immediate connection with Groupmuse:

“Here was an organization leveraging Internet platform know-how, not for the sake of a small group of shareholders, but for the continuation of our millenia-long tradition of gathering to hear music. Fast forward to now, and I am Groupmuse’s most frequent performer, having just presented my 150th groupmuse, and Groupmuse is still empowering musicians like me to independently organize intimate house concerts.”¹

Methodology

As a cellist, I’ve found both my musical voice and a community of friends through Groupmuse, performing more than 120 house concerts in California and New York since 2015. My involvement deepened when I joined the co-op’s Steering Committee and helped guide its transition from a founder-led startup to a worker-owned cooperative. This report draws on that lived experience, as well as interviews with Groupmuse team members, performers, hosts, and audiences.

To understand the landscape in which Groupmuse creates an alternative market, I begin by looking at the income range of freelance performers. The platform serves different purposes depending on each artist’s financial—or social—needs. For those early in their careers, house concerts can act as paid training: a chance to practice audience engagement, event promotion, and performing in intimate spaces.

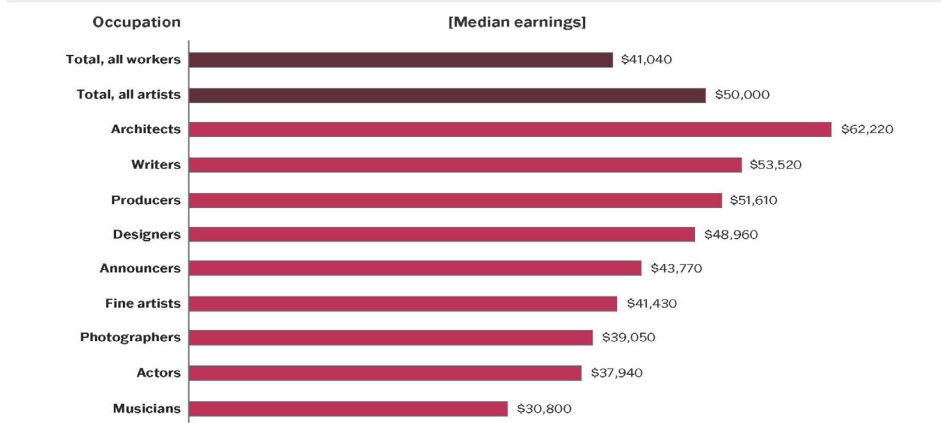
In a field where performers are often expected to “pay to play,” Groupmuse flips the script by paying for both time and labor. A \$150–\$200 concert fee might be vital income for some and a meaningful social exchange for others—offering connection, visibility, and dignity in a space that’s typically extractive. Assumptions that only the wealthy can afford to pursue art obscure a more complex truth: artists come from diverse backgrounds, and many rely on other jobs to sustain their practice. Privilege, class, and race continue to shape who gets

access—and who gets overlooked. In response, Groupmuse creates space for performers and audiences long excluded from private, often insular, concert settings.

Income Disparities Among U.S. Musicians

Artists in the U.S. earn less than the national average—and musicians earn less than most artists. According to the National Endowment for the Arts, full-time musicians made a median income of around \$42,000 in the mid-2010s, compared to a national median of about \$60,000.² That gap widens for younger performers: in 2022, musicians aged 18–29 earned a median of \$30,800, barely above the poverty line. These figures, however, only hint at a fragmented reality—where income varies widely depending on career stage, employment type, and whether one balances music with other work.

Figure A8-3. Median annual earnings for all workers and artists aged 18–29 employed full time, by artist occupation: 2022



NOTE: "Full time" is defined as working 35 or more hours per week for 50 or more weeks per year. "Architects" include architects and landscape architects. "Fine artists" include fine artists, art directors, and animators. "Musicians" include music directors, composers, and musicians. "Producers" include producers and directors. "Writers" include writers and authors. Separate data for dancers and actors were not available.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2022.

Figure 1: Median annual earnings for all workers and artists aged 18-29 employed full time, by artist occupation: 2022. Source: National Endowment for the Arts, Measuring the Arts: Indicator A.8: Young Artists, 2024, pg 4.

A performer's genre or instrument can also shape their economic reality. A 2020 survey of 111 full-time jazz and improvisation musicians in New York City found that 65% earned less than \$13,000 annually—barely above the federal poverty line³. Broader surveys echo these struggles: in a national study by MusiCares, nearly half of musicians cited finances as their top source of stress, and most said they couldn't afford health or dental insurance⁴. Similarly, CRNY (Creatives Rebuild New York) found that 62% of New York artists had no emergency savings, leaving them one crisis away from collapse⁵.

Pandemic Impact on Livelihoods

COVID-19 exposed just how precarious a musician's livelihood can be. With performances canceled and some organizations withholding payment under force majeure clauses, many lost income overnight. Yet despite widespread hardship, a 2021 survey by Groupmuse Foundation found that 83% remained committed to their craft—holding onto music not just as work, but as purpose.

"As we reflected on our findings, we realized the deeper issue: musicians are far too often not paid what they deserve. [...] It's not about charity; Groupmuse is about helping musicians grow stronger in the pursuit of their craft as a viable livelihood."⁶

An example of this shift to support artists is Creatives Rebuild New York's Guaranteed Income for Artists Program, which gave participating artists \$1,000 a month—enough consistency for many to begin saving or investing, not just scraping by.⁷

Few Seats, Fierce Odds: The High-Stakes World of Orchestral Employment

Earnings in the field vary widely based on name recognition, venue, and whether one holds a salaried position with benefits. Consider, for example, the competitive landscape of major orchestras. These institutions, offering starting salaries of at least \$80,000 depending on the city and budget, may employ up to 100 tenured players and substitutes, accounting for a significant share of stable performance jobs that are both few and fiercely contested. For instance, the New York Philharmonic, a prime example of such institutions, announced in 2024 an increase in their annual musician base salary from \$153,504 to \$205,000⁸. Orchestra jobs are rare and highly competitive. Even in 2010—a year with unusually high turnover—there were just a dozen openings in the New York Philharmonic, ten in Boston, and seven in Los Angeles⁹. Turnover in major orchestras is slow—openings may appear only once every 10 or 20 years. Many musicians audition dozens of times before landing a seat, if they ever do.

High Audition Costs and Equity Gaps

Auditions are expensive, and most performers shoulder the costs themselves—flights, lodging, and uncompensated time. Limited support programs like the National Alliance for Audition Support offer some relief, highlighting how even modest aid can open doors in an otherwise exclusionary system¹⁰. Financial support can help level the playing field—15% of supported artists won auditions—yet deeper inequities persist. The arts workforce remains less racially and ethnically diverse than the general labor force, pointing to barriers that go beyond cost¹¹. From 2002 to 2014, Asian and Pacific Islander representation grew, and Hispanic/Latino numbers rose slightly, but the percentage of Black musicians remained

stagnant at around 1.8%—a stark reminder that removing financial barriers is only one piece of a much larger systemic puzzle¹².

Surplus Graduates, Scarce Jobs

That puzzle becomes even more complicated when considering scale. What happens when the number of highly trained orchestral musicians far outpaces the number of available jobs? Each year, nearly 22,000 students graduate with music degrees—about 21,000 from accredited schools and another 500 from top conservatories like Juilliard, Curtis, and Yale—flooding a labor market with far fewer opportunities than candidates¹³. Granted, not all music graduates aim for orchestral careers—many continue their studies or shift into other fields. But if only a third play orchestral instruments and half of them actively pursue orchestra jobs, then with just 100 openings available, the chance of landing one can fall below 3%¹⁴. With such slim odds, about 97% of those entering the orchestral track must look elsewhere—navigating a fragmented arts workforce with few stable options and little safety net.

Groupmuse's Low-Barrier Alternative

As an alternative to the costly and competitive audition circuit, Groupmuse offers a low-barrier path to performance through house concerts—no audition fees, no travel costs. Musicians apply by submitting a simple form and performance videos, which don't need to be professionally produced. Once approved, they can bid on upcoming concerts or reach out directly to hosts. While competition still exists, the platform gives artists tools to generate their own opportunities—turning the scarcity of gigs into a chance to create more work, both for themselves and their peers.



A cello quartet performed in a Dumbo loft in Brooklyn in 2018. Photo by Erin Pearlman.

Many performers work outside orchestras as self-employed freelancers—over half of those in the field, according to federal data. They take gigs with ensembles, at events, and on tours. While the median hourly rate—around \$39—may seem high, it obscures a more precarious reality: irregular schedules, unpaid downtime, and the burden of covering one’s own costs¹⁵. What looks stable on paper often isn’t¹⁶.

The Missing Musicians in the Gig Economy

Although the term “gig” originates in the music world, performers are conspicuously absent from most discussions of the gig economy, as Cloonan and Williamson point out in their paper *Musicians as Workers and the Gig Economy*¹⁷.

Historically, musicians have struggled to have their labor recognized as work. In early twentieth century Britain, for instance, the Trade Union Congress dismissed them as “double jobbers”—enjoying a cushy life of music while competing with “real” workers for temporary jobs¹⁸.

Broader Freelancing Trends

Freelancing has also expanded beyond music in the U.S., with three in four freelancers saying technology has made it easier to find work—and 64% finding jobs online. Even seven years ago, a 2018 report by Freelancers Union and Upwork noted that the freelance workforce had grown by 3.7 million over five years, with one in three Americans freelancing

and many citing flexibility as essential due to health or caregiving needs. Since then, these trends have only intensified. While many face the stress of managing inconsistent income, 77% still reported better work-life balance—even as 63% said the demands of freelancing caused anxiety¹⁹.

Freelancing's flexibility can benefit musicians too—platforms like Groupmuse, which organizes on-demand house concerts, offer paid gigs that help supplement income. To address the instability of such work, Groupmuse provides a guaranteed minimum payment, reducing pressure on musicians to target wealthier neighborhoods and allowing audiences to contribute what they can. To support musicians facing income instability, Groupmuse has steadily increased its guaranteed minimum payment per performer—from \$50 before 2020 to \$125 by 2024. Musicians who don't receive that amount through audience contributions can request that Groupmuse cover the gap, a policy that has helped ensure more equitable access to paid performance opportunities.

Connecting Early-Career Musicians

Groupmuse helps early-career musicians new to a city connect with the local scene, offering access to gigs and a network in an industry where freelance work often depends on personal connections.

A violinist who moved to New York City in 2018 to study at The Juilliard School performed through Groupmuse because it was a casual way to rehearse and perform with other students. She also appreciated how easy it was to meet people in a new city: “I met non-musicians through Groupmuse, because Groupmuse provides a comfortable space to socialize with people you’ve never met before. Meeting people who work in different fields is difficult when you’re a musician surrounded by other musicians at school. I felt less isolated when I first moved to the big city because of Groupmuse.”²⁰

Groupmuse offers a ready-made community that musicians can tap into at any time—both as freelancers and as individuals.

Overcoming Venue Barriers

Freelance musicians who want to organize their own concerts often face high venue rental costs. Rates typically range from \$50 to \$150 per hour, depending on factors like location, size, accessibility, and seating. Most concerts require at least 3 to 4 hours to include setup and cleanup, and some venues have minimum booking requirements. In New York City, this means a single performance for 50 people can cost between \$600 and \$2,500—just for the space. Instead of paying for costly venue rentals, musicians can use Groupmuse's network of

hosts and audiences to perform and promote concerts for free. This lets them focus on their music and audience-building, without needing to fundraise or spend personal funds. In this model, hosts provide the space—such as a living room, backyard, or gallery—and help fill the guest list with friends and local Groupmuse members. In return, they aren't required to pay the musicians and receive three months of free Groupmuse membership for each event they host.



Outdoor Groupmuse in Oakland, CA — November 2021, socially distanced. Photo by Liuyin Lena.

One pianist in Los Angeles leveraged Groupmuse's platform to launch her own concert series and cultivated relationships with audiences who eventually became dedicated supporters of her new nonprofit organization: "The Groupmuse platform has been an important tool and resource for freelancing musicians such as myself. In 2022, I launched the first season of my project to share classical music and wine pairings, and presented four house concerts in homes in Los Angeles. Because Groupmuse already had an active community of house concert hosts and audiences, I was able to immediately tap into an existing audience, rather than build my audience and email list from zero. Startup costs for an individual musician's project are difficult, if not impossible, to cover out of pocket. For each of my house concerts that I organized for my concert series, I was able to pay each musician a competitive performance stipend (at least \$250 per performer for the 45-minute program), since Groupmuse's policy is that 100% of the audience contributions collected at the house concert go to musicians."²¹

By creating new paid performance opportunities, Groupmuse has established a flexible and accessible marketplace where musicians can perform with dignity.

House Concert Traditions and Platform Safeguards

House concerts have a long global history. In classical Indian music, musicians perform in intimate *baithaks*—private gatherings where audiences sit on the floor as the artists introduce and improvise ragas. Similarly, in 17th- and 18th-century Europe, aristocrats in Vienna and Paris hosted salons featuring composers and musicians. Franz Schubert, for example, held “Schubertiades” in Vienna, where he premiered new works for gatherings of artists, thinkers, friends, and royalty.

A common thread across house concerts is that they are typically invite-only. Hosting in a private space usually means guests are personally known or just one degree removed, which offers a sense of safety. However, this can reinforce social segmentation within a city, keeping audiences stratified. Payment expectations also vary widely from one host to another, and for both musicians and audiences, navigating different house concert series can feel fragmented. Groupmuse addresses this by unifying house concerts on a single platform—streamlining access for audiences while expanding each host’s reach beyond their immediate circle. Hosts can use built-in tools to invite local Groupmuse members, helping to grow audiences and increase musicians’ earnings.

Safety and harassment prevention are central to Groupmuse’s model. To maintain trust while keeping house concerts accessible and affordable, the platform surveys all hosts, musicians, and attendees after each event. A zero-tolerance policy is in place, and any concerns are reviewed by a Conflict Committee, which offers support to anyone who feels unsafe.

Groupmuse: Origins and Early Experiments

In 2013, Sam Bodkin—a Columbia-educated champion of classical music—began organizing house concerts, or “groupmuses,” with students from the New England Conservatory in Boston. Inspired by the informal, music-filled gatherings he attended in Allston, he was struck by the mix of serious performance and party-like energy. At “Linden Hall,” a house concert series run entirely by musicians under 25, performances with handwritten programs flowed into late-night revelry. As the only non-musician in the room, Bodkin was captivated by the tight-knit, joyful community around classical music—an experience that sparked the idea for Groupmuse.

Founders and Cooperative Ethos

The larger community context from which Groupmuse emerged helped shape its fundamentally cooperative ethos, though that intention wasn't explicit at first. Within a year of the first Groupmuse, Bodkin was joined by co-founders Ezra Weller, who managed communication with musicians and hosts, and Kyle Nichols-Schmolze, who built the web platform to streamline house concert logistics. They believed that the depth, beauty, and intimate scale of Western classical chamber music made it an especially powerful vehicle for fostering local community.



A trombone quartet performed on the Santa Monica beach in summer 2021. Photo by Anjali Banthia.

Growth, Attention, and Repertoire Guidelines

Until 2021, Groupmuse required that at least half of each 45-minute performance feature Western classical music. While musicians could include experimental or non-classical pieces, the founders saw the platform as a way to make 17th- and 18th-century European music more accessible to people under 40—challenging the idea that it's exclusive, outdated, or out of reach.

With the help of volunteer organizers and early hosts, Groupmuse grew from just a few events per month in early 2014 to 20 monthly concerts. By 2015, it was hosting 75 concerts per month across Boston, New York City, and San Francisco—aiming to build inclusive local

communities welcoming people of all ages, backgrounds, and levels of familiarity with classical music.

Once dubbed “the Airbnb of classical music concerts” by Forbes—a flattering but fraught comparison—Groupmuse has been featured in *The Globe*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and NPR.

“Quick, imagine a string quartet concert in a private home. Marble floors, vaulted ceilings, and uniformed servers with hors d’œuvres platters probably come to mind. But this was rarely the case with the private concerts organized through the buzzy classical music startup Groupmuse, which matched musicians with music lovers — often younger than those in the typical Symphony Hall audience — for casual, intimate concerts in backyards and living rooms.”²²

Unlike most concerts, where audiences buy tickets at a set price in advance, Groupmuse house concerts rely on voluntary contributions collected during the event. A host or Groupmuse volunteer passes around a hat for donations—\$10 was the suggested amount in 2014, rising to \$20 by 2021. All contributions go directly to the musicians.



100% of contributions go directly to the musicians. Photo by Erin Pearlman.

Another key difference is the intimate, casual setting that invites both musicians and audiences to drop into close-knit gatherings on weeknights or weekends. As one NYC-

based cellist recalled: “Groupmuse events certainly surprised me with the extremely intimate nature of performing in someone’s apartment for 15–20 people sitting on the floor or on the couch. So often at classical concerts, we are separated from the audience by a stage and rows of seats, so to have them nearly at arm’s length was a rather interesting change.”²³ This intimacy dissolves the usual divide between performers and audiences, and hosts also often cherish the chance to share their living rooms with both.

One Groupmuse host in the San Francisco Bay Area shared:

“The first concert I attended was so exciting—young musicians milling around a small house, eating pizza and drinking wine and beer, with enthusiasm I had rarely seen [...]. I have hosted over 80 [concerts]; the first featured the Brahms F Major Cello Sonata, with gifted musicians who went on to study at Juilliard and Cornell.”²⁴

Crowdfunding Success and Regional Expansion

This spirit of intimacy and community sustained Groupmuse in its early years—but by 2015, the founders had been working without pay, and the platform could not continue growing on reservation fees and Supermuser subscriptions alone. That year, Groupmuse raised \$140,000 through a Kickstarter campaign backed by nearly 1,500 supporters, along with about \$100,000 from community investors through Simple Agreements for Future Equity. With this funding, Groupmuse expanded to Seattle and Washington, D.C., and began paying its three full-time founders and part-time contractors.

Groupmuse Activity in 2016

City	Events occurred	Number of reservations	New users	Total musician reported income	Average musician pay per event
New York City	281	6,523	7,241	\$58,873	\$124.21
San Francisco	171	3,399	3,453	\$42,265	\$144.61

City	Events occurred	Number of reservations	New users	Total musician reported income	Average musician pay per event
Boston	161	3,065	3,476	\$27,878	\$109.80
Seattle	100	50	2,500	\$18,779	\$142.15
Washington, D.C.	19	405	1,181	\$2,894	\$92.72

Source: Groupmuse dashboard.

Between 2017 and 2019, Groupmuse became profitable but reinvested earnings to support growth. In 2019, it hired four part-time Regional Community Managers to expand local communities in San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia—helping activity continue to grow in those cities.

Groupmuse Activity in 2019

City	Events occurred	Number of reservations	New users	Total musician reported income	Average musician pay per event
New York City	397	9,986	4,702	\$84,861	\$146.46
San Francisco	247	7,507	3,191	\$76,533	\$170.13
Boston	141	2,937	3,476	\$31,215	\$137.82
Chicago	68	1,002	657	\$11,669	\$115.84
Philadelphia	44	645	508	\$9,709	\$157.03

Source: Groupmuse dashboard.

Groupmuse continued to grow in revenue and activity until February 2020, when COVID-19 abruptly canceled all events—a disruption whose impact on the platform and its musicians will be explored later.

Number of Groupmuse events per month (2014-2020)

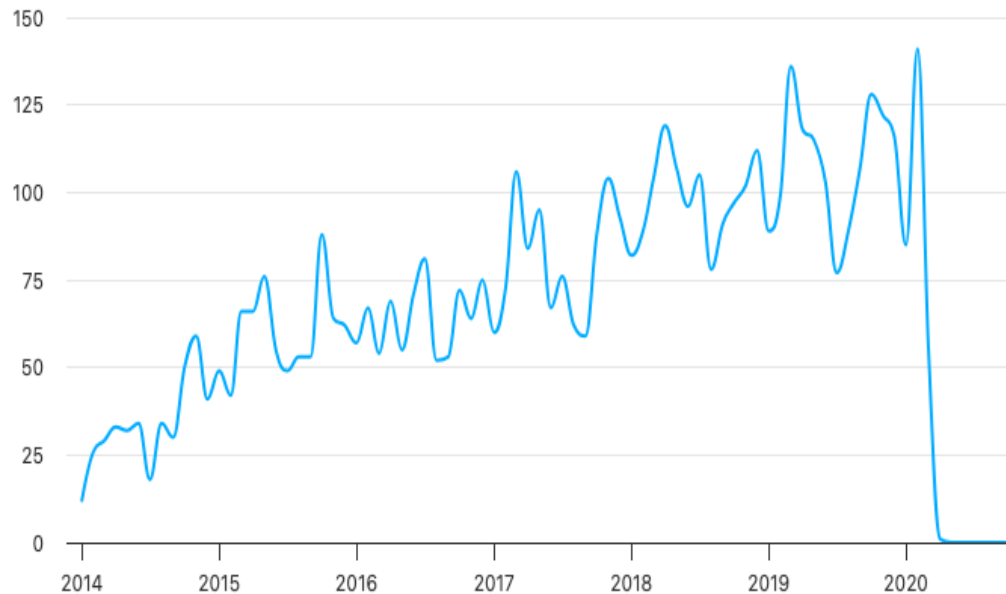


Figure 2. Source: Groupmuse dashboard.

Groupmuse has also seen musicians and hosts organize house concerts outside the United States, in cities such as Berlin, Paris, Krakow, London, Toronto, and Stockholm. These events were independently coordinated by local volunteers, without direct involvement from the Groupmuse team. In support of these efforts, Groupmuse waived its platform fees so that all audience contributions went directly to the musicians.

Groupmuse's Mission and Values

Groupmuse's original mission was to demystify and democratize 17th- through 19th-century Western classical music. In 2021, the worker-owners updated that mission to reflect a broader focus beyond Western European traditions. Today, Groupmuse is a worker- and musician-owned cooperative dedicated to uplifting artists and strengthening community through live, intimate performances of historically rooted music. Bodkin described the questions that guided the team in a blog post:

“We started asking ourselves deep and difficult questions about the work that Groupmuse does and the kind of music we center. Questions like: Why is it that there is a special and exclusive place for Western European classical music in our society? Institutions to carry it forth, with 7, 8, 9 figure endowments? Big, beautiful concert halls? Yes, it deserves all of those things — but surely it isn’t the only music that does. Perhaps it reveals a deeper pattern of power in our society — a pattern that contemporary movements are striving to evolve beyond.”²⁵

After months of careful discussion and research led by a committee of worker-owners, Groupmuse revisited its long-standing musical guidelines. The conversation centered on how to introduce music to new audiences without excluding traditions outside Western Europe. As a result, the platform announced in 2021 that it would no longer require that half of each house concert consist of “Western classical music”—a category loosely defined as tonal works by composers like Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Franz Schubert, written before 1945.

In place of this rule, Groupmuse introduced a new standard: each performance should include at least 20 minutes of historical music, defined not by geography or canon, but by three guiding principles:

- It is rooted in a pedagogical tradition that stretches back at least a century.
- It demands a deep, long-term commitment to craft.
- It is intended for intimate settings—“chamber music” in the broadest sense.

This shift expanded the platform’s musical offerings to include traditions such as Indian classical music, jazz, and West African kora performance, embracing a wider spectrum of instruments, lineages, and sounds. The worker-owners aimed to encourage both musicians and audiences to see music as a universal language—rather than reinforcing hierarchies between genres.

To further that vision, Groupmuse launched the Planetary Music Movement (PMM) in 2020, presenting monthly virtual concerts and forums highlighting artists of African descent. Since returning to in-person events, PMM has continued under the curation of cellist Dara Hankins and saxophonist Alfredo Colón, with regular gatherings that explore the artistry and voices of the African diaspora.



At a 2023 Groupmuse concert presented by Planetary Music Movement in Bushwick, Brooklyn, saxophonist Tivon Pennicott and his trio performed. Photo by Alex Joseph.

Groupmuse’s worker-owners also took time to articulate the values that shape their work and guide the organization’s evolution—values grounded in openness, community, and care. At the heart of this framework is a commitment to listening: to oneself, to others, and to the world, with presence and genuine connection. There is also a shared emphasis on leading with heart—bringing love, thoughtfulness, empathy, and honesty into both collaboration and daily tasks. And finally, there is a deep belief in impact—not only at the grand cultural level, but in the quiet, everyday transformations that happen between people. These values are not just aspirational—they shape how the team works together. In regular peer reviews, feedback and appreciation are framed explicitly through this lens, ensuring that the organization’s principles are lived, not just stated.

Transparency on Musician Pay

One way Groupmuse enacts its “Impact” value is by ensuring transparency around musician pay. Since 2014, the platform has tracked earnings from house concerts to provide national-level data in a field traditionally governed by informal agreements. After each concert, musicians complete a survey detailing how the event went and how much was collected from the audience.

Over time, average pay per musician has increased, thanks in part to thoughtful event

matching. When a host submits an event, Groupmuse matches the number of musicians to the space’s audience capacity to help ensure fair compensation. The basic formula used is:

$$(Suggested\ contribution \times Capacity) \div Number\ of\ musicians = Expected\ pay\ per\ musician$$

For example, with a suggested \$20 contribution and 25 attendees, two musicians would each earn approximately \$250. However, recognizing that not all guests contribute the full amount—and some may cancel last-minute—Groupmuse also calculates a conservative estimate. If only 20 guests attend and contribute an average of \$12, the musicians might receive \$120 each. In that case, Groupmuse covers the \$5 gap to meet its guaranteed minimum of \$125 per performer (as of 2025). This system supports fairer pay while adapting to the informal, community-based nature of house concerts.

Average Pay per Musician per Event (in dollars)

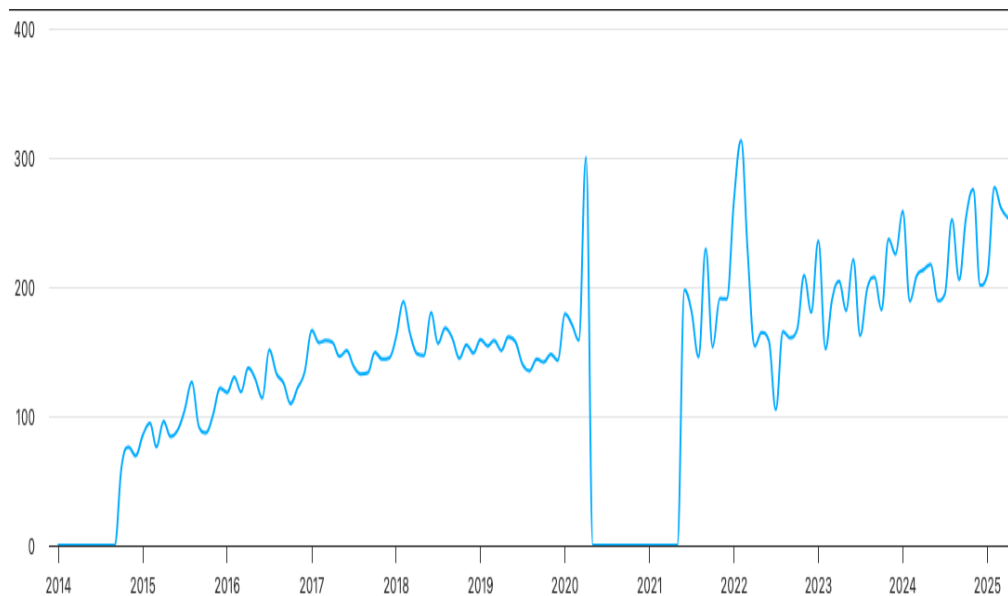


Figure 3. Source: Groupmuse dashboard. N.B. The above graph only includes data from “in person” events, and excludes virtual concerts during COVID-19 between March 2020 through June 2021.

The graph below shows average musician pay rose to \$446.41 during the period when Groupmuse offered live-streamed concerts via private Zoom links. Virtual concerts ended in 2023 due to declining demand.

Average Pay per Musician per Virtual Event

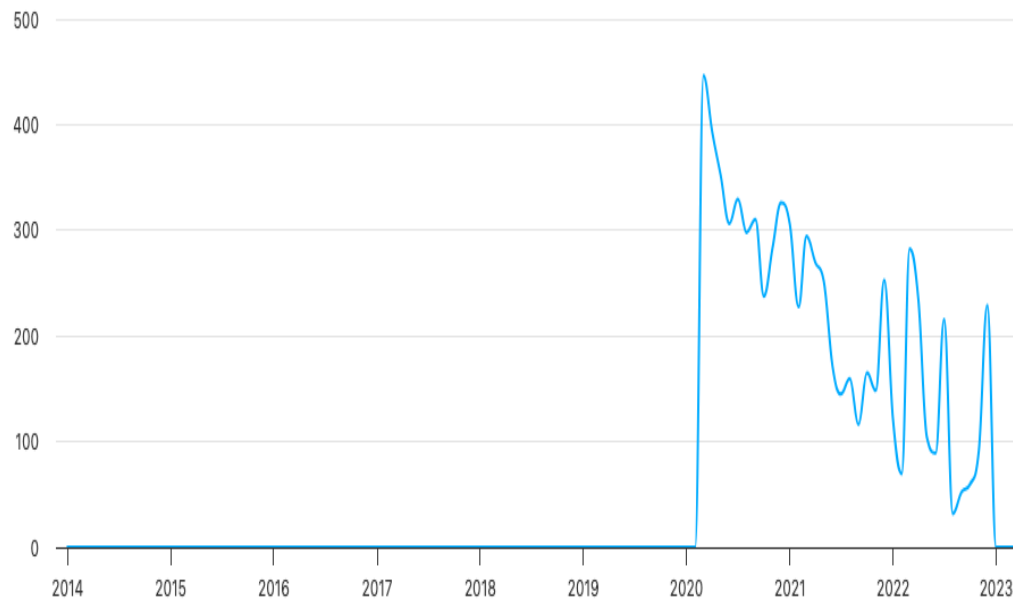


Figure 4. Source: Groupmuse dashboard.

One cellist in New York who has performed four Groupmuse house concerts and at least twenty private house concerts outside of Groupmuse, reflected that hosts of non-Groupmuse events did not always clearly communicate whether he would receive payment: "I don't always know how much I'm getting paid for every concert. Some of that is me putting trust in the person who invites me (often with whom I've worked before), and some of it is disorganization on both the presenter and musician sides. I do think the industry is slowly getting better about being transparent, however."²⁶

Because audience contributions go directly to musicians, not through Groupmuse's bank account, this income is not included in the organization's revenue. Still, tracking musician pay remains a key measure of Groupmuse's impact.



Photo 7: Sound Off for Bail x Protestra, February 2023. Photo by Alex Joseph

Building the Platform

At its start, Groupmuse was little more than a listings site: events were posted, and attendees RSVP'd. But as interest grew, so did the demands. Kyle Nichols-Schmolze, one of the founding developers, built the early site in Ruby on Rails 3 with JavaScript—enough to get concerts off the ground. At first, the team manually matched musicians and events, but eventually hosts needed to create their own listings, musicians needed to claim events, and audiences needed to hear about concerts automatically, by region, every week.

The result wasn't just a concert platform—it was an evolving, lightweight alternative to Mailchimp, Eventbrite, and Venmo. Over the years, Groupmuse added its own systems for email marketing, guest list management, and direct credit card payments through Stripe Connect—ensuring audience contributions flowed straight to musicians, without touching Groupmuse's bank account.

Most of the platform was built in-house. The email system, for example, had to handle 100,000 Tuesday sends segmented by region—something no external tool could manage affordably. After Mandrill sunset, Groupmuse migrated to Amazon SES and used Delayed Job and auto-scaling Heroku workers to queue and deliver email blasts efficiently. AngularJS was introduced for early interactivity, later replaced with Turbo and Stimulus as Rails evolved. Today, the front end is lean, maintainable, and modular, with minimal dependencies.

Dozens of features emerged from direct needs: a private messaging system (via Mailboxer), SMS invites to boost engagement, in-site invitations, public profiles for musicians and hosts, and even a CRM built from scratch for the team to manage relationships at scale. These tools allowed Groupmuse's fully remote team to operate entirely within the platform, avoiding fragmentation across third-party tools—saving hundreds of staff hours over time.



Groupmuse audience immersed in live chamber music. Photo by Erin Perlman.

Performance and cost efficiency became top priorities. The team halved its hosting costs by migrating from Heroku to DigitalOcean and replaced UploadCare with Backblaze B2 and Bunny.net. They adopted Posthog for analytics—never handing data to Google or Facebook.

But none of this is static. Features are rebuilt. Bugs surface. User needs shift. Groupmuse's development cycle is continuous and deeply responsive—driven by A/B tests, feedback loops, and the persistent question: how do we help someone go from first-time listener to lifelong host? From attendee to ambassador?

The tech stack is important, but the ethos driving it—community, ownership, live music everywhere—is what gives the platform its staying power.

Becoming a Cooperative

As early as 2015, the Groupmuse founders began exploring a cooperative structure. Initial research made clear that full cooperative incorporation would require resources they did not yet have, so they opted instead to incorporate as a Public Benefit Corporation (PBC)—a legal framework that allowed them to operate between a traditional for-profit and a mission-driven nonprofit. Groupmuse became a Delaware PBC in 2019.

That same year, the team attended the Platform Cooperativism Consortium conference in New York City, where they connected with LIFT Economy, an impact consulting firm supporting cooperatives and B-corps. This encounter became a turning point. With guidance from LIFT consultant Shawn Berry, Groupmuse's Steering Committee developed a clear cooperative strategy, operational structure, and cultural foundation.

By December 2020, Groupmuse's six team members signed an Internal Cooperating Agreement, formally transitioning the organization to a worker-owned cooperative on January 1, 2021. From that point forward, the team collectively managed the platform's development, grew its user base of hosts and musicians, promoted events, and forged partnerships with institutions like Lincoln Center in New York and San Francisco Ballet.

This shift in structure proved critical during Groupmuse's most financially precarious moment—the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In many organizations, budget crises result in layoffs or departures when compensation is cut. But Groupmuse's model of mutual ownership and trust allowed the team to make steep payroll cuts without losing a single member, preserving continuity when it was most needed.

The cooperative model was quickly tested. Responsibility for the organization's financial future no longer fell solely on the founders; it had to be shared. This meant radically transparent conversations about personal finances. Team members assessed what they could afford and, where possible, reduced hours or temporarily worked without pay. Founders Sam Bodkin and Kyle Nichols-Schmolze volunteered to go without pay for at least six months, and some worker-owners offered to reduce hours and seek part-time employment elsewhere.

These sacrifices, while generous, highlighted key challenges. The team learned that going unpaid for more than three months led to burnout and strain—even with the option of unpaid sabbaticals. One member's deferred compensation prompted the team to formalize policies around logging unpaid hours and planning for repayment, especially in the event that a worker-owner exited the cooperative. These hard-earned lessons deepened the team's understanding of sustainability, not just for the organization, but for each person in it.

The Musician Council

In November 2020, after finalizing its first phase of worker ownership, Groupmuse invited ten longtime performers to explore what cooperative membership could look like for musicians. While worker-owners managed the platform's operations, the vision for "musician-owners" centered on investing through their artistic work and community-building efforts.

This group—called the Musician Council—set out to shape a model of musician ownership: defining how musicians contribute to the cooperative and how they might benefit in return, particularly those who had sustained Groupmuse for years by performing, recruiting hosts, and growing audiences.

As founder Sam Bodkin wrote at the time: "The only path forward is solidarity, solidarity, solidarity. We need new structures to manifest that solidarity in abundant ways so we can break from a zero-sum, scarcity-minded world that's in too much trouble to help us anyway."²⁷

Ten musicians of the founding Musician Council met with each other and with Groupmuse worker-owners to discuss how Groupmuse can address challenges felt by musicians in the gig economy. Kiyoshi Hayashi, a violinist based in Boston, explained:

"We're really targeting musicians who aren't necessarily taken care of by larger institutions. Who haven't necessarily taken the traditional routes of getting an orchestra job or teaching position at a university. We're seeing if we can provide this community that can give them the resources and whatever they need to thrive as musicians and as people."²⁸

The Musician Council began meeting weekly, and for the first three months, members participated in an onboarding series led by the Groupmuse team. These sessions introduced cooperative values, the organization's history and goals, its budget and data practices, and what it means to operate as a cooperative. The Council established community agreements for its meetings and offered ongoing feedback to the worker-owners, particularly on platform design and user experience.

Toward the end of the Council's first term, a significant concern emerged: the lack of compensation for musicians serving on the Council. Although the role had been framed as volunteer-based from the beginning, members began to question the fairness of this arrangement. They noted that the unpaid nature of their work risked reinforcing a power imbalance between worker-owners and Council members. In response, the worker-owners

approved a change: beginning in the second term, musician-Council members would be paid at the same hourly rate as worker-owners.

In the second and third Council terms, musicians collaboratively drafted Groupmuse's "Musician-Owner Internal Cooperating Agreement." This agreement was signed by the first cohort of eight musician-owners in October 2021, followed by six in February 2023 and seven in May 2023. The agreement outlines that to become a Musician-Owner, a performer must be an approved Groupmuse musician, perform at least one groupmuse, complete the onboarding (live or via recording), and commit to performing at least two groupmuses per calendar year.

As of 2025, there are 28 active and 16 inactive Musician-Owners in the cooperative.

"Ultimately, this path is the values-integrated one. It's the musicians who've done most of the labor to build the Groupmuse community. Every email address we have, every dollar we've earned, every living room that has welcomed us in, has been because so many musicians have devoted their lives and endless hours of work to making beautiful music. It's on the backs of the performers community that this project developed, and so they should own it."²⁹

One challenge that worker-owners and Musician Council members faced in their first year of collaboration was aligning expectations around outcomes—especially given the lack of guaranteed profit-sharing due to ongoing budget uncertainty in the wake of COVID-19. Council members needed access to sufficient information and historical context to make informed decisions, and trust between the Council and worker-owners was still in development.

To help formalize communication and avoid informal backchannels, the team established a system where two designated individuals serve as "links" between the worker-owners and the Council. This clarified the flow of proposals and requests, ensuring that conversations didn't default to ad hoc exchanges that bypassed the collective process.

Another way the Musician Council was incorporated into Groupmuse's governance was through the participation of two Council representatives in the platform's monthly board meetings, where they advised on strategy, budgeting, and operations—particularly in areas affecting musicians.

The Musician Council also helped define a set of benefits for Musician-Owners. These include access to flexible and low cost fiscal sponsorship through the Groupmuse Foundation, which allows musicians to fundraise and offer donors tax deductions under the Foundation's nonprofit status. Musician-Owners are also eligible to serve on the Council itself, participating in decisions about platform features and fee structures; those who do are paid hourly for both meetings and administrative work. They have access to financial and activity data via the admin dashboard and the Groupmuse Discord server. Additionally, they can apply for project grants managed by the Council—such as the seven \$500 mini-grants awarded in 2024 to support musical projects performed at Groupmuse events.

Musician-led organizing has strengthened community and advocacy across the platform. Through the leadership of two Council cohorts, musicians throughout the United States have formed new partnerships, including instances where New York-based performers traveled to San Francisco to collaborate with Council members. When Council members raised concerns about serving in advisory roles without compensation, Groupmuse responded by implementing a formal policy to pay musicians for their contributions. Recognizing that time spent in meetings and administrative efforts is also labor—not just performances—was a key learning from the Council's work. Thanks to their leadership, Groupmuse deepened its commitment to centering musicians' voices and addressing power dynamics tied to compensation.

Benefits and Challenges of Cooperative Governance

In Groupmuse's new cooperative infrastructure, all decisions are made by the team through the advice process³⁰, where worker-owners who lead a department may make a decision after seeking input from everyone who will be meaningfully affected, and also those with expertise in the matter. Instead of hierarchical management with traditional executive roles that hold the majority of authority and power, Groupmuse's strategy and team culture is stewarded by the Steering Committee.

Groupmuse's board consists of worker-owners and two (non-voting) musician-owners from the Musician Council. All worker-owners at Groupmuse have equal access to budgeting and decision-making through an advice-based process, and they are responsible for appointing the members of the Steering Committee. While the Steering Committee is tasked with interviewing new hires, proposing organizational priorities, and preparing budget reports, final approval of these decisions rests with the full body of worker-owners when needed. This approach allows for faster, more flexible decision-making than traditional consensus or consent-based models. To become a worker-owner, a team member must hold a role of at least 20 hours per week for six months, after which they are considered for membership by the board through a modified consensus process.

One key benefit of Groupmuse's cooperative governance is that decision-making is shared among all worker-owners. Major decisions around budget, strategy, and operations are discussed at monthly board meetings, where input is gathered from the entire team through the advice process. While any worker-owner has the power to block a proposal that conflicts with their values, this rarely happens—and when it does, the proposal is typically revised in collaboration with the objecting member until consensus is reached. For more time-sensitive matters, decisions can be made asynchronously via proposals and votes on the team's Discord communication platform.

Another strength of this model has been remarkably low staff turnover. Since 2014, of the core full-time team, only one founder and two worker-owners have left the team. This stability may reflect a combination of flexible work schedules, a culture that celebrates each worker-owner's artistic pursuits, and a willingness to adapt responsibilities to fit individual needs. In a 2025 survey, 100% of worker-owners reported strong satisfaction with Groupmuse's mission, values, advice-based decision process, and work-life flexibility. As one team member put it, "I really enjoy being a worker-owner, and feel a greater sense of 'ownership' in our success as an organization since becoming one."³¹ The flexible work schedule has also been helpful for the Groupmuse team, which consists of almost 50% freelance musicians.

One challenge of Groupmuse's cooperative culture is balancing flexibility with accountability. The team supports worker-owners as artists and individuals, encouraging them to self-assign tasks, set timelines that align with their lives, and avoid urgency or burnout. While this approach fosters autonomy and well-being, it can lead to delays, missed deadlines, or deprioritized projects—especially when work critical to revenue isn't completed according to the team's quarterly priorities. Without hierarchical management, stalled projects may stay unresolved unless the individual actively seeks feedback or support. As one worker-owner noted, "We've got our challenges as an organization about accountability, deadlines, and project management, but on the whole I appreciate working in a less hierarchical structure."³²

Worker-owners Who Are Also Freelance Musicians

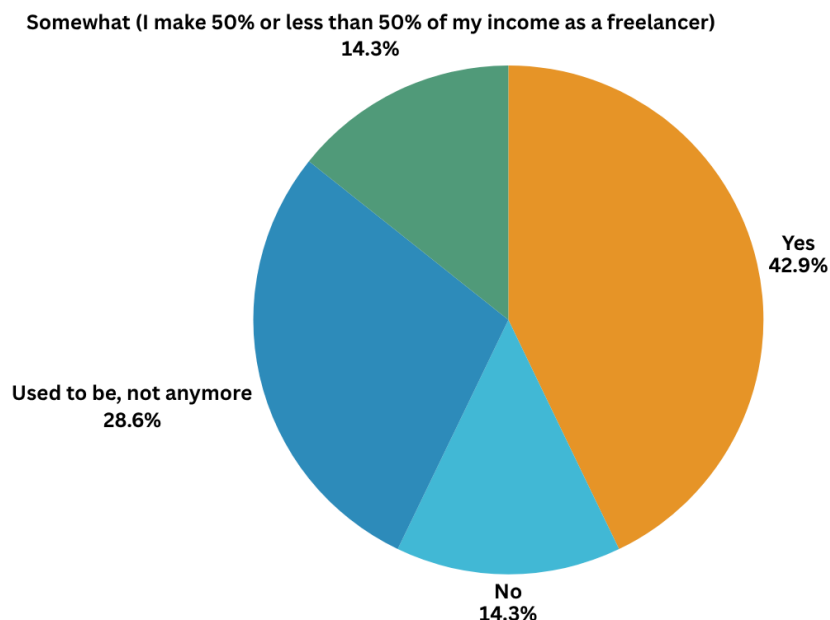


Figure 5. Source: Groupmuse dashboard.

Managing cash flow has been a persistent challenge for Groupmuse’s Steering Committee and team, especially within its less hierarchical structure. Ensuring that part-time, hourly work meaningfully contributes to the platform’s financial health requires careful coordination. In late 2024, as the team shifted focus to grow its Nights Out program, revenue lagged behind projections. To extend the budget into 2025, the team collectively agreed to reduce hours and pay by at least 40%.

To support this transition and improve cross-departmental coordination, a worker-owner was appointed project manager for two six-month terms. This role required a team-wide consent process and a formal vote, adding approximately two weeks for advice-gathering and scheduling. With slower decision timelines, the Steering Committee had to strike a careful balance between budget constraints and the need to realign team efforts around shared priorities.

Groupmuse’s business model relies on a creative mix of revenue streams, and this diversification has allowed the organization to stay flexible and responsive to shifts in the artistic landscape. At the same time, its long-term commitment to community building presents challenges. Investments in part-time Regional Community Managers—who build relationships by attending events and engaging directly with hosts, musicians,

and audiences—do not always result in immediate revenue gains. Groupmuse’s model, mentioned earlier, is outlined in more detail below.



Groupmuse gathering. Photo by Erin Perlman.

Groupmuse’s Business Model

Groupmuse’s financial model rests on three main revenue streams: house concerts, subscriptions, and ticketing partnerships with established music institutions. This diversified approach didn’t happen overnight—it was the result of years of experimentation to build a system that could sustain the platform while keeping live music accessible. It is a good thing it evolved: during COVID-19, when house concerts were impossible, Groupmuse’s survival depended on that flexibility.

Today, each stream accounts for roughly a third of the platform’s total revenue, though the balance shifts depending on the year and the city.

The first revenue stream emerged from the core experience: house concerts. Instead of charging a traditional ticket price, Groupmuse asks attendees to pay a small “reservation fee” to hold their seat. This fee started at \$3 in 2016 and rose to \$5 in 2021. It is not a big cost—but it makes a big difference. When the team experimented with free reservations, cancellations spiked. That meant fewer guests and lower earnings for musicians. A single concert capped at twenty people could lose 25% of its income if just five people did not show up.

Reservation fees also serve a deeper purpose. They draw a clear line between what goes to Groupmuse and what goes to the musicians. At the concert, hosts pass a hat or a bowl, and guests contribute directly to the performers—cash only, no cut taken by Groupmuse. This setup reinforces a culture of generosity: audiences know they paid a nominal fee to reserve their spot, but when the music ends, they are invited to give what they can. In many cases, they give more than expected, especially when reminded that 100% of their contribution goes straight to the artists.

The second stream is built on loyalty. Audience members who attend regularly can become “Supermusers,” supporting the platform with a monthly or annual subscription. Originally priced at \$5 per month, the membership now costs \$9 monthly or \$90 per year. Supermusers can reserve seats at as many house concerts as they like, and they still contribute to the musicians at each event. They also receive perks—like discounted tickets to large-scale Groupmuse events and special “Nights Out” at major venues. The subscription model rewards consistent supporters while helping Groupmuse plan more confidently for the future.



NYC Massivemuse with Charles Yang and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra Groupmuse audience. Photo by Erin Perlman.

Thanks to the steady support of Superusers during COVID-19, Groupmuse was able to weather the financial uncertainty and resume organizing outdoor events as live performances returned in late 2021. Their monthly contributions provided crucial recurring revenue at a time when other income sources disappeared amid widespread event cancellations.

The third revenue stream—Nights Out ticket sales—comes into play once a local Groupmuse community reaches a certain level of activity, typically a few house concerts per weekend and at least 1,000 email subscribers in a given city. At that point, Groupmuse partners with local concert presenters to offer discounted tickets to its subscribers. It's a win for everyone: arts organizations get help filling unsold seats—especially with younger, more diverse audiences—and Groupmuse introduces its community to larger-scale musical experiences, often at a fraction of the usual ticket price.

These concerts, which typically cost between \$35 and \$100 per ticket, are made available to Groupmuse subscribers at reduced rates. The organization earns revenue by marketing these events and selling the tickets directly to its growing audience of live music lovers. At its peak in February 2020, Nights Out brought in nearly \$19,000 in a single month.

But when the pandemic hit, this revenue stream vanished overnight. With all concerts canceled, venues closed, and partner organizations entering crisis mode, Groupmuse had to pause Nights Out entirely. When live concerts resumed in late 2021, the team reached back out to former partners—only to find that many had undergone staffing changes, budget cuts, or complete strategic overhauls. Rebuilding took time. Between 2022 and 2024, Groupmuse shifted its focus back to house concerts, slowly growing that core network while waiting for venues to stabilize.

By spring 2025, Nights Out had regained momentum, bringing in nearly \$10,000 per month once again. Still, this revenue stream remains fragile. It depends heavily on the health and capacity of local music institutions. When a city's concert scene is struggling or major venues aren't filling seats, Nights Out offerings are limited—reminding the team that adaptability and community resilience remain at the heart of Groupmuse's long-term strategy.

Groupmuse “Night Out” Revenue per Month (Before 2020)

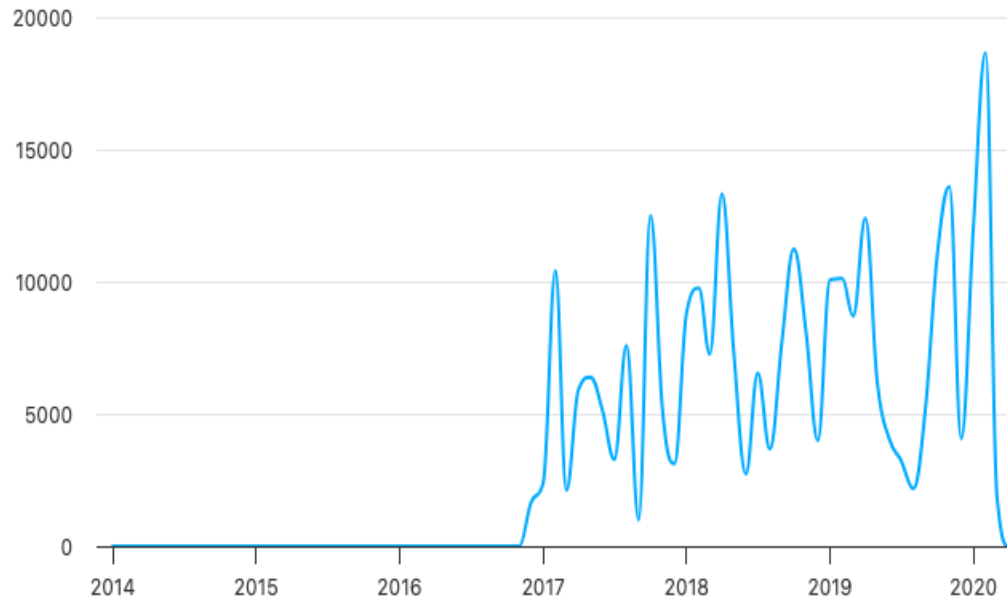


Figure 6. Source: Groupmuse dashboard.

Challenges during COVID-19 for Musicians and Groupmuse

Freelance musicians, already navigating a precarious gig economy, were especially hard hit during COVID-19, when in-person events were canceled from March 2020 through at least July 2021. The sudden disappearance of live performance work revealed the vulnerability of freelancers who often lack the protections afforded to salaried employees. In response, musician unions such as the American Federation of Musicians, along with advocacy groups like the Music Workers Alliance (MWA), Freelancers Union, and the Union of Musicians and Allied Workers (UMAW), fought to ensure that freelancers were included in unemployment insurance benefits—support they had previously been excluded from.

As UMAW wrote in a letter to government officials in March 2020, the crisis laid bare the reality facing music workers:

“Even before the crisis, the large majority of musicians were suffering under the precarity of the gig economy. According to a 2017 survey by the Music Industry Research Association, the median income of a working musician was \$21,500, far below the median U.S. income of \$31,900. Most musicians are forced to work second jobs [...] Yet our current unemployment system is structured to prevent these workers from receiving any benefits. We should have long ago updated our system to serve our changing economy, but the current crisis makes it

absolutely essential that we do so right now. [...] We ask you to ensure that an increase and expansion of unemployment to all workers with 1099 income, including musicians, touring workers, and other gig economy workers, is included in any federal relief package.”³³

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the deep vulnerabilities of freelance musicians, whose incomes vanished overnight when live performances were canceled. The CARES Act, passed in March 2020, temporarily extended unemployment benefits to gig workers and freelancers. But even with this support, musicians faced steep hurdles—especially the abrupt need to adapt to virtual performance, invest in equipment, and learn live streaming technologies on their own.

For Groupmuse, the crisis became a turning point. Within days of shutting down all in-person concerts in March 2020, the team launched a Musician Relief Fund, raising \$25,000 from its community to provide direct payments to affected artists. Then, over just a few weeks, Groupmuse fully reinvented itself as a virtual concert platform. The team provided training and tech support for musicians, updated the platform’s infrastructure, and even hired musicians to manage online events and engage with audiences.

Thanks in part to its already remote structure, Groupmuse quickly adapted. The first virtual concert was held on March 22, 2020, and by the end of the year, the platform had hosted 450 online events and generated over \$200,000 in income for 250 musicians. One performer reflected: “During the pandemic, Groupmuse quickly transitioned to streaming concerts in order to provide musicians like me some of our lost performance opportunities. In addition, I was able to supplement my income by working as an online event producer for the platform.”³⁴

The crisis revealed not just how fragile the ecosystem is—but how fast creative responses rooted in mutual aid can reshape it.

In sharp contrast to most music institutions which exercised the *force majeure* clause in contracts to avoid paying musicians³⁵, Groupmuse deployed its resources to focus on supporting musicians, despite uncertainty of how long the pandemic would impact its budget. After six months of the team working overtime to help musicians earn revenue through live streaming, the Groupmuse team revisited its budget. They reduced monthly spend by 44% when three team members announced they will not accept their full-time salary, with other team members decreasing work hours.

As a cooperative practicing transparent co-budgeting, Groupmuse approached financial challenges with collective responsibility. Team members openly discussed their personal finances, took on outside jobs when needed, and voluntarily cut their hours—prioritizing one another and the musicians before taking risks with the organization’s limited funds. This collaborative, trust-based approach allowed the team to extend Groupmuse’s runway during difficult periods.

Still, internal sacrifices could only go so far. In 2023 and 2024, Groupmuse was able to expand beyond its bootstrapped budget thanks to business loans from Shared Capital Cooperative and AmbitioUS, as well as a grant from the California Arts Council. These loans were made possible by Groupmuse’s cooperative structure and through introductions from LIFT Economy and the Center for Cultural Innovation. After submitting a detailed business plan outlining a path to profitability, Groupmuse secured a loan from Shared Capital Cooperative that enabled the first hourly pay increase since 2016—from \$25 to \$30—and funded the hiring of Regional Community Managers in Boston, NYC, and San Francisco, along with new project-based marketing staff.

Grants played a key role as well. Support from the California Arts Council allowed Groupmuse to invest in rebuilding its California network, including hiring part-time Regional Community Managers in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Within a year of focused organizing in L.A., house concerts grew by 20%, reservation fees by 43%, and reported musician pay by 23%.

These cooperative and community-based funding strategies highlight a contrast: while the team made internal sacrifices rooted in solidarity, they also secured targeted external support that rewarded their long-term planning and cooperative model.

Another piece of the funding puzzle was filled by the Groupmuse Foundation, which played a crucial role in helping Groupmuse stay focused on serving musicians and generating income for them—especially during the steep revenue declines of the COVID-19 era. Although legally distinct, the Foundation remains an integral part of the broader Groupmuse ecosystem.



Groupmuse Picnic, November 7, 2021. Photo by Liuyin Lena Song.

Groupmuse Foundation

In its first year, the Foundation enabled Groupmuse to host 450 online concerts, generating over \$200,000 for 250 musicians. It also created new part-time admin roles, offered training for live streaming, and published a report in 2021 on how COVID had reshaped musicians' lives. Without the Foundation's help, much of this work simply would not have been possible. Groupmuse Foundation's survey in 2021 revealed that COVID-19 deepened financial insecurity for musicians, many of whom received no compensation for canceled performances. This instability was not limited to freelance musicians in Groupmuse's network—it affected even those with salaried positions and union representation, highlighting the widespread precarity across the music industry during the pandemic. These findings helped shape the Foundation's grantmaking priorities—directing resources toward recently graduated or freelance musicians who lacked financial safety nets.

Groupmuse Musician Survey, June 2021, 94 respondents

Were you financially impacted by COVID-19?	
Lost 100% of my income	10%
Lost 75% of my income	23%
Lost 50% of my income	24%
Lost 25% of my income	18%
Income increased	4%
No change in income	21%

Source: Groupmuse dashbaord.

Groupmuse Musician Survey, June 2021, 85 respondents

Did you experience any of the following due to COVID-19?	
Experienced financial stress	77%
Have US\$5000+ in student debt	29%
Experienced rent or housing insecurity	21%
Experienced increasing credit card debt	15%
Experienced medical expenses	13%
Experienced food insecurity	5%

Source: Groupmuse dashboard.

Groupmuse Cooperative and Groupmuse Foundation work together to support musicians, each operating within distinct for-profit and nonprofit structures. The Foundation has its own board, bylaws, and fiscal oversight, with strict conflict-of-interest policies to ensure transparency when granting funds to the Cooperative. To maintain clear communication boundaries, board members route feedback through the Foundation chair, who communicates with the Executive Director.

Now in its fifth year, the Foundation has raised funds from individual donors and public grants, including from NYSCA and NYC’s Department of Cultural Affairs, to support initiatives like the Planetary Music Movement—which has presented nearly 80 events featuring over 100 artists of African descent. Prioritizing musician input, the Foundation has also funded the Musician Council’s “mini grant” program, which awarded \$500 grants to 20 musicians, giving artists a say in how funding is allocated.

Inspired by the generosity and commitment of organizations such as [Art.coop](#), Platform Cooperativism Consortium, and AmbitioUS to lift up cooperatives and artists, Groupmuse Foundation will continue to prioritize serving musicians who lack access to funding (whether institutional, grants, or family financial support) so that more musicians can afford to perform and work as artists.

Building Community Through Music

Since joining Groupmuse in 2019—first as a Regional Community Manager, later as a worker-owner of the Cooperative and founding Executive Director of the Foundation—I have had the joy of working with people who believe that gathering musicians and audiences can build a caring, creative community. After a shoulder injury that led me to seek work outside of performing, I was determined to share the magic of house concerts

with more listeners. Thanks to the guidance of the founders, the dedication of the team, and the support of the Foundation's board, Groupmuse has done just that: supported musicians and knit together a network of music-lovers who look out for one another.



Groupmuse performed by author weeks before giving birth, October 2023.

House concerts remain my favorite way to experience live music. Performing in living rooms helped quiet my inner critic, refine my playing, and ultimately gave me the confidence to pursue graduate studies I once thought out of reach. Groupmuse taught me to “listen local” and “play local,” proving that artistic growth does not require constant touring—it flourishes in local community.

I carry an enduring hope that house concerts will go on connecting people to one another, as they have connected me to music, to meaning, and to love. It was at one of my earliest performances through Groupmuse that I met my husband, and that serendipity continues to echo through my life. I’m deeply grateful to Sam Bodkin, Kyle Nichols-Schmolze, Ezra Weller, every member of the team past and present, the Foundation’s generous supporters, my teachers, the musicians who brought these spaces to life, and the hosts whose homes opened into friendships.

See you at a Groupmuse soon.

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